



## **The old, the pure, and the quirky**

### **Contested heritage values in the urban redevelopment of the Carlsberg breweries in Copenhagen**

Riesto, Svava

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# The old, the pure, and the quirky

## Contested heritage values in the urban redevelopment of the Carlsberg breweries in Copenhagen

Svava Riesto



## Abstract

Creating new urban futures for post-industrial sites presents multiple challenges to European societies. It implies assessing the existing sites – their layered meanings, uses, materialities and roles in the city – and requires us to make several choices about heritage values. This paper presents a case study of the brewery of Carlsberg in Copenhagen, and how it is transformed during urban redevelopment. The author presents the initial plan, shows how things did not go quite as imagined (when do they ever?) and illuminates a gap between the experts and new public users' perception of the site. Acknowledging that neither heritage nor aesthetics are absolute values, the article calls for more open and adaptive ways of transforming industrial sites.

Fig. 1

*Traditional heritage conservation is often occupied with preserving selected objects that experts consider the best or most representative buildings of a type or period. The Elephant's gate, built as an adorned water tower in 1901 by the famous architect Wilhelm Dahlerup, it is one of the structures at the former Carlsberg breweries that is listed.*

*Photo: Carlsberg Byen.*



In many European regions, industrial production facilities change due to socio-political and economic processes. Some of the abandoned industrial sites are converted into new urban districts, forcing the involved stakeholders to mediate between the traces of industrial past on site and its desired future state. Such transformation involves a lot of political, economical, ecological and functional considerations and also cultural questions, which I will focus on here, concerning how we value the existing traces from the industrial period in new contexts. Although every urban redevelopment

process involves heritage issues, the wider value framework that influences our choices are often vaguely expressed, let alone openly discussed. What material structures of the former industrial facility do we deliberately want to retain for the future city? What do we decide to change in striving to meet what we believe will be tomorrow's needs, desires and challenges?

By examining the processes of assessment, preservation, demolition and reuse at the urban redevelopment of the former Carlsberg breweries in the city of Copenhagen this paper questions the established practices of defining and preserving heritage value in the context of urban transformation.<sup>1</sup> First, I will briefly show that the field of heritage definition and management is not a mere safeguarding of obvious values, but a changing field with multiple perspectives and possibilities. Then, I present the ongoing redevelopment of Carlsberg from brewery to city district and which role heritage played in it. The study scrutinizes the planning and heritage acts, uses and physical changes on the Carlsberg site 2006–2016 to find out how different actors – mainly focussing on the heritage and planning experts and daily users – have assessed its traces from 150 years of industrial beer production. The study shows a gap between the dominant heritage conservation experts and the new users' perceptions of Carlsberg, and thereby problematizes the use of the criteria connected to traditional conservation in the context of spatial planning. In conclusion, I call for more open valuation practices.

## Defining heritage values an open field with multiple perspectives

While traditional heritage conservation practice has developed relatively detached from spatial planning, heritage and development are becoming increasingly integrated. Heritage conservation understood here as the body of official practices of cultural heritage protection developed in European countries during the 19th century and onwards to protect what was seen as the most important antiquities. It is based on a way of thinking that is still expressed in many heritage laws, formal institutions and established practices to protect national heritage.<sup>2</sup> Heritage conservation is based on the idea that we as a society should protect a collection of objects that are seen as indispensable documents that can represent a collective version of history.<sup>3</sup> In Denmark, for instance, the officially stated criteria for listing buildings today is based on two criteria that reflect the thinking of traditional heritage conservation: first, listing targets historical artifacts that are considered able to represent “significant characteristics of societal development”.<sup>4</sup> The second criterion has to do with the perceived architectural quality of such representatives; they should be “among the best (...) of their type and period”.<sup>5</sup>

In recent decades heritage has become more and more intertwined with spatial planning for a number of reasons. Spatial development in European cities no longer happens on what can be perceived as “blank space”, but increasingly becomes a question of creating positive futures on already urbanized land. The International Building Exhibition (IBA) of the German Ruhr district (1989–1999) became an international reference as to how local heritage values can be engaged in stimulating new and sustainable futures for a region, not in opposition to, but *with* heritage.



Fig. 2 (left and right)

The Carlsberg breweries in

the city of Copenhagen.

Aerial photo prior to the redevelopment project begun in 2006 (left) and visualization of the new district as imagined in 2009 (right). The idea was to turn the production site into a dense and “vivid city district”

by adding 60,000 new m<sup>2</sup> of floor space to accommodate the mix of housing, businesses and cultural institutions.

Photos: Calsberg Byen/Entasis Architects.

All over Europe, there are many different examples of how heritage definition and management increasingly happen closely linked to spatial planning, which can be referred to as “new heritage”.<sup>6</sup> Here, the starting point is not to protect a collection of historical documents from change, but to contribute to a positive change; the social, ecological and economically sustainable development of a specific location. The European Council’s Faro convention is a key document in new heritage-thinking and emphasizes that heritage can be used as a resource to strengthen “social cohesion” and “identities”.<sup>7</sup>

In this perspective, cultural heritage is less about keeping selected objects in a state that reflects a certain moment in time, but rather, cultural heritage can be flexible resources that can be activated in adjusting a place to future needs and desires. In such local heritage processes, not only conservation experts, but also a broader range of new actors – planners, designers, cultural entrepreneurs, critics and more – engage in doing heritage.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, the attitude towards historic significance is changing, so that the perception of what can have heritage value is expanding from old castles, churches and buildings by famous architects, to an attitude where also relics of workers, woman and other less dominant people in society or histories that have a local significance are considered valuable. In a new heritage perspective, in principle everything that is inherited from the past can potentially become valuable for the future development of a place – tangible and intangible aspects, old and new built structures, be they made by architects or other actors. With its local and future-oriented perspective, new heritage is often closely tied to the economic and demographic competition that spatial development projects engage in.

New heritage is related to an epistemological shift in the thinking of architects, landscape architects and urban designers that has been taken place in the last 5–6 decades; from conceptualizing design as innovation *ex nihilo* to acknowledging that design is about intervening in the ongoing transformation of a place and thus engaging in its past, present, and future. In such a dynamic perspective the encounter with a former industrial site is less of a “wipe the board and build anew”, than a creative engagement with the existing qualities of a specific location as a way to fuel new aesthetics, new possible meanings and new views upon urbanity.<sup>9</sup> To think design in such a transformation-perspective is also tied to an increasing awareness that the construction industry is resource hungry and there is every reason to become better at adapting the buildings that have already been erected.



To sum up, defining and protecting heritage values is not a question of just safeguarding the obvious. Rather, it is a cultural practice in which many actors can participate, and whose outcome is closely linked to our values and thinking, and to the societal issues and contexts in which it is defined. Multiple perspectives and agendas are operative in different fields that are related to heritage definition and management. Conservation is one such framework, but new ways of thinking have emerged that focus much more on the local conditions and desired futures of specific places where heritage is used as a resource. Let us now turn to Carlsberg's planning process and examine how heritage has been defined and debated, changed and preserved as part of its urban development in 2006–2016.

## Carlsberg's redevelopment project begins: Planning with heritage

Carlsberg was founded as a brewery outside of Copenhagen in 1848 and is today one of the largest global brewery brands with production and markets worldwide. Its founding site in Copenhagen has now become engulfed by the city and in 2006 Carlsberg Ltd announced that they would move the Copenhagen production to a newer facility in the Danish town of Fredericia which offered better possibilities to adapt to new production and distribution processes.<sup>10</sup> The historical brewery site, then, was announced to become a “vivid urban district in historical settings.”<sup>11</sup> The brewing company commissioned the overall planning, aiming at selling property bit by bit as soon as a comprehensive plan was settled. This strategy appeared to be the most profitable in Copenhagen's growing property market in the early 2000s. Carlsberg Ltd also considered that playing a strong role in the redevelopment was a way to avoid potential failure, criticism, and damage to the corporate brand since the site and the company's history were positively perceived by local beer-customers.<sup>12</sup> The names of the urban project *the Carlsberg city* and its slogan “our city” –referring to Carlsberg's famous adds on the Danish market “our beer” –reflect how strongly the corporate brand became entangled with the perception of the history and the future of this place in the city.

In 2006 Carlsberg Ltd launched their idea to redevelop the Copenhagen facility with a large open international ideas competition with more than 200 participating teams from 35 different countries. To define the task of the competition the private developer (Carlsberg Ltd, who had kept the ownership of the site), Copenhagen Municipality and the Heritage Agency of Denmark innovatively formed a partnership and co-wrote the brief. The aim was to create a vivid urban district that would be attractive to live in, work in and to visit attracting a broad range of people. The participants in the competition were to provide a balance between retaining the special qualities of the place and at the same time creating new spaces for completely new users. The brief stated that the area should become a “dense, vibrant and liveable neighbourhood” while also emphasising that the historical brewery was a “national treasure”.<sup>13</sup>

The ideas competition was accompanied by a thorough survey of largely all existing buildings and some gardens and open spaces.<sup>14</sup> The competition posed the questions of which buildings could be

retained and how dense new development could be. Simultaneously, the Heritage Agency of Denmark classified the Carlsberg Breweries as the first Industrial Site of National Significance, and begun a survey that later formed the basis for listing selected buildings and gardens during the planning process (fig. 1). These heritage surveys built on a conservation-rationale which sought to find samples that could document the Denmark's industrial history and what the experts assessed as the best architecture.

In 2007, the architectural practice Entasis won the competition with the masterplan *Our Spaces* that set the parameters for the development of the politically approved plan; *the Carlsberg Local Plan*.<sup>15</sup> Entasis prescribed one of the densest building programs of all competition teams – an extra 60,000 new built square metres of floor space on this 30 ha area to accommodate the new functions of housing, businesses and cultural institutions (fig. 2). The competition brief had emphasized that urban space was crucial to the success of the new city district, and the winning proposal, *Our Spaces*, introduced many new urban squares of different shapes and sizes.<sup>16</sup>

## Plan B: Attract new users

The financial crisis hit the Copenhagen property market in 2008 and the property sale and therefore also construction, came to a halt. The Carlsberg Ltd Real Estate Department searched in vain for co-investors, but started in parallel to lease properties in order that the former production site, which had newly been opened to the public, should not seem too empty: One of Denmark's most well-acclaimed galleries, Nicolaj Wallner, moved in as early as 2008, along with others who asked to lease spaces. The year after, Carlsberg Ltd commenced a more strategic approach to finding the entrepreneurs, cultural visionaries and trendsetters that could best generate the desired urban life on the Carlsberg site. Aiming at keeping up momentum and to ensure that this highly communicated urban development project remained attractive to potential investors, Carlsberg Ltd came up with the idea of commissioning three urban space installations in the open, public spaces of the brewery (fig. 3). These were planned to be there for approximately five years; as markers that communicated that something was happening here and that new users were welcome to play and reside. During this period an increasing number of Copenhageners and tourists became familiar with the formerly closed production site, which was now used for everything from street markets to go-cart racing, concerts, play and dance performances.

In 2012 with the largest private real estate transaction ever the Carlsberg site was sold to a consortium.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile the Copenhagen property market had recovered, Carlsberg's sales commenced, and construction got under way. At the same time as space was to be made for the planned development, the consortium terminated the temporary contracts with the cultural entrepreneurs that had been welcomed during the waiting period and the temporary – but by then well-known and popular – urban space installations were removed.



In the wake of the construction of new buildings around 2015 the Carlsberg development project for the first time experienced significant public criticism. In many of the national newspapers the Carlsberg development consortium was accused of following a short term logic and blind economic focus, when they terminated tenancy agreements with the galleries, bureaux and stage artists that had given the place new life.<sup>18</sup> Several critics pointed out that the change in ownership was a problem: with the site no longer in the hands of the tradition-bound brewery company, but belonging to stakeholders with weaker ties to the site, the focus became more unambiguously money-oriented. Carlsberg's new owners have focussed mainly on attracting a new audience that can afford the new apartments that are built and many former industrial structures disappear. While this social and economic critique is utterly relevant, there are also important issues to be raised here about assessing Carlsberg's existing industrial structures that are now demolished to make room for new buildings.

## Official heritage decisions contested by new users

The official planning of Carlsberg has followed a logic of building new and keeping a few old buildings in-between, very much following the rationale of traditional conservation and design *ex nihilo*. The heritage and planning experts valued the Carlsberg site in ways that differ significantly from of the new users –be they go-kart racers, artists, concert audiences or others that spent time at the Carlsberg urban site between 2008 and 2015. Because of the rental strategy, the new tenants did often not reside in the old, monumental buildings for Carlsberg's management and directors, which had by then been listed as some of the “best” and “most significant” artefacts from Denmark's industrial past.<sup>19</sup> Rather, the new Carlsberg users rented rooms in the large post-war industrial buildings that went largely unseen or were just rejected by heritage experts, planners and architects in the official planning acts (fig. 4).<sup>20</sup> These large industrial structures, built in standardized materials and with long ground plans to make room for assembly lines,<sup>21</sup> have since the beginning of the planning process been earmarked for demolition (fig. 5).

Fig. 3

*This free standing roof to protect beer crates against sunlight did initially not gain much attention by Carlsberg's planners and heritage experts. In 2010 it became one of the temporary open space projects that aimed at stimulating positive publicity after the financial crisis hit the redevelopment process. 3.500 white ropes now produced a special aesthetic experience and encouraged climbing, playing tag, making knot swings or just seeing the wind's movement. The Rope Forest, by the designers Keingart, is an example of a creative engagement with existing and apparently unsightly and unimportant elements from the 20th century's industry. It became a popular place to visit, especially for children and young people, and was at the same time an advertisement for the economically driven regeneration project.*

*Photographs*

*Svava Riesto 2008 (left), Anders Hviid/Keingart 2010 (middle) and Anders Noerby/Keingart 2010 (right).*

Fig. 4

Concert in one of Carlsberg's bottling plants. Not considered worthy of keeping during the planning and heritage assessments of the new Carlsberg district, Tap 1 became a popular concept venue that drew new people to the formerly closed-off production area. It has been scheduled for demolition during the entire planning process.

Photo: Tap 1 Press



Now, as construction has recommenced and the temporary tenants have been given notice, they have been offered accommodation in the new buildings being built. But although the price difference is not always remarkable, they decline the offer because they came precisely because of the raw industrial atmosphere and would now rather move on.<sup>22</sup> It should not be a surprise that first movers follow the pioneering spirit by moving on to new emerging urban areas. We ought, however, to consider why there is such a great discrepancy between the official plan and conservation strategy for Carlsberg and the enthusiasm that has characterised the reuse of Carlsberg's newer industrial and distribution halls in recent years.

Fig. 5

The bottling plant Ny Tap is one of the buildings that were used by new tenants, such as cultural venues, bureaus and ateliers. It was not considered worthy of keeping and has been planned for demolition from the beginning of the urban project.

Photo, Adrian Täckmann 2012.



The temporary users often describe Carlsberg as a creative breathing space away from the polished city. Consultant Mads Byder from the bureau Urban Help, which has been responsible for supplying temporary tenants to the Carlsberg site, emphasises the area's attractive "edge" and "quirkiness".<sup>23</sup> Art critic Line Rosenvinge is also fascinated: "There is an aesthetic of decline, 'terrain vague' and industrial charm about the Carlsberg site and the areas around Tap1".<sup>24</sup> The aesthetics that they advocate for is not reflected in the decisions regarding conservation and development that the professionals have made for Carlsberg: most of the 20th century buildings with their raw aesthetic and openness for new users are to be demolished. But why, when these buildings have been so good to reuse and so attractive to so many Copenhageners and visitors?



Fig. 6

*As new users became familiar with the Carlsberg site around 2010, they expressed admiration for the “edge” and “quirkiness” of the area. Surprising juxtapositions between old and new elements created an atmosphere that made the site distinct. This outdoor climbing facility was built into a row of trees that separates a statue of the brewery director Carl Jacobsen from a production area in the back. It became a popular place to visit and play in a special atmosphere, and has now been removed.*

*Photo: Svava Riesto 2015.*

When the plan for the new Carlsberg district was made reuse perspectives were not in focus. Rather, the plan’s main intent is to create a sustainable and lively neighbourhood and the idea was that this could best be achieved by building densely. A densely built urban district provides short distances, so one can hope that people drive less in cars, it can provide the foundation for a bustling life on the streets and one can hazard a guess that a dense neighbourhood is more profitable for a company that sells property. As large parts of the Carlsberg site were constructed in the 20th century with wide carriageways and extensive halls for machines and production, a radical redevelopment was considered necessary to achieve the density ideal. The new compact neighbourhood we see in the plan for the new Carlsberg quarter comprises new narrow streets, urban spaces and skewed corners with a few listed historical buildings in between. Paradoxically, in their urge to design spatial variation, the architects and planners removed much of the existing spatial wonder that characterised Carlsberg’s layered conglomerate of different periods of industrial architecture (fig. 6).

Neither have the experts, who have made an decisions about Carlsberg’s heritage protection and thus defined its architectural qualities, been concerned with the area’s “edge” and “aesthetic of decline”. The Heritage Agency of Denmark has worked within the value system of conservation; concentrated its effort on preserving the oldest buildings commissioned by the brewery’s founding fathers and also protected some newer buildings that have been designed by famous architects. Copenhagen Museum, which is the municipality’s advisor in cultural heritage issues, has focused on expanding the conservation canon by documenting the technological development right up to our time and by valuing remnants of the everyday of blue-collar workers. This view has, however had less impact on the planning. Thus although the Carlsberg site reflects a broad span of different periods in industrial history from 1848–2008, official heritage acts primarily address the really old, and do not consider that the industrial buildings from the second half of the 20th century also reflect our societal development and culture.

The temporary users’ enthusiasm for Carlsberg’s large industrial halls demonstrates that aesthetics is more than retaining canonised norms for what “the best” architecture is, as underlies the official heritage documents of Carlsberg. Rather, aesthetics is an issue that is constantly negotiated among different groups, where that which we thought was insignificant or ugly can potentially be appreciated in new ways.

Also the way that Carlsberg’s protected buildings are maintained and developed is worth discussing in terms of its values. The old, monumental and listed or preserved buildings at Carlsberg which



Fig. 7

*The old, monumental buildings at Carlsberg that will remain standing between the new build are usually cleaned and polished. Here, pipes and other structures that had been attached to many the walls on the Central Machine Building are removed. Thereby some of the unique qualities of this urban area disappear, both in relation to documenting a part of the social history and to creating a sense of wonder in the future urban quarter.*

*Photograph from 2015, Svava Riesto.*



will remain standing in-between the new development are usually purified; Outdoor extensions and material are taken away, so it appears as if time has stood still and as if the dirty work, that was also part of the everyday working life here did not exist. We can see this on many of Carlsberg's heritage protected monumental brick buildings (fig. 7).<sup>25</sup> These are cleansed into solitary works of architecture depicting a stasis that has never been. So although the rationale for keeping these buildings has been to document history, the way that they are maintained narrates a fictional past; Traces of Carlsberg's multiple alterations, additions,

connections and adjustments to constantly developing means of brewing are now erased and an ideal building that exists as enclosed entity is established. With this practice of retaining the oldest buildings only and in such a purified form, the heritage work at Carlsberg in fact wipes out part of our history along with site specific architectural qualities that were created through constant rebuilding to accommodate changing production through 150 years.

When workers left the Copenhagen brewery site in 2008, it was peppered with small utility buildings, pipes and enormous steel tanks that were screaming for ideas for reuse. Such richness is difficult to invent from scratch. Most of these elements have paradoxically disappeared in the development that aims to create a unique neighbourhood, rich in experiences and historical flair, just as new users were starting to discover them (fig. 8). Despite of its innovative approaches, Carlsberg's urban redevelopment follows a traditional procedure where the plan was drawn and architectural conservation was decided upon before new users arrived and begun to test what the area could be reused for.

## Towards dynamic and open practices of urban redevelopment

The Carlsberg example exposed a time-gap that poses challenges to traditional planning and heritage conservation: it is only with the arrival of construction cranes that people in the city are recognising the decisions professionals often have taken long before about reuse, new build and demolition. Former production plants often have few continuities of use, so that when workers leave it takes time before other citizens become familiar with the area and feel that its future matters enough for them to engage in public discussions. If all significant decisions on planning and heritage are taken in the early years, it is difficult for people to involve, even though the planning includes public meetings and attempts at a dialogue. Giving people better possibilities to involve in decisions about how places in the city transform requires new methods for engagement and a will to plan in ways that can adapt



*Fig. 8  
Carlsberg's largest new-built complex is a quite generic structure. It does not adopt significantly to the industrial architecture nor the activities of the people that had used Carlsberg after the financial crisis.  
Photograph from 2016 Svend Rossen/UCC.*

new learnings and new perspectives underway. Acknowledging that it is possible to discover new possibilities for reuse and to formulate new heritage values along the way, stakeholders have to find alternatives to the established procedures for planning and heritage making.

The point here is not that the aesthetic and somewhat romantic perception of “industrial flair” that we heard people from Carlsberg’s art-scene express should be upheld as a new universal norm. But for the urban areas to be public places for social encounter we need to allow for a discussion about different aesthetics in the city. And from the perspective of ecological sustainability, we should not put all our trust in technical invention of new building materials that attempt at being sustainable, but also become better at reusing, reinventing and altering existing structures in the city. This requires that we appreciate the existing city beyond the conservation perspective to keep a few old, monumental buildings in a purified and static version. With broader and more dynamic perspectives on heritage values we can develop diversity of possibilities, aesthetics, and interpretations to allow different people to make sense of existing places in the city and to participate in an open discussion about the future.

A broader perception of what can potentially be valuable can contribute to making our environment more aesthetically diverse and possibly more compatible with the city’s social and cultural plurality and dynamics. In the encounter with a historical site, designers, planners and heritage experts’ ideas about what is beautiful and valuable can be modified and new solutions can be developed. There are no obvious answers to what should be retained, reused, preserved and how, but there is a need for lively and public debate about values and about how different voices can make themselves heard in the change of cities. And there is a need to fundamentally question what heritage does, what it can do and for whom.

## Notes

1. An earlier version of this article, written in Danish, is published in the journal *Fabrik og Bolig*, 2016, 66–73.
2. Kolen 2005.
3. Kolen 2006.
4. Danish Act of Listed Buildings and Preservation of Buildings and Urban Environments, § 1.
5. The Danish Agency for Culture n.d. : How does a building become listed?/ [www.kuas.dk](http://www.kuas.dk)
6. Fairclough 2009.
7. Council of Europe 2005.
8. Riesto & Tietjen 2015; Fairclough 2009.
9. Braae 2015.
10. While all production and distribution was relocated, Carlsberg Ltd kept its global administrative headquarters on the Copenhagen site, as well as a visitor's centre with a micro brewery and a few other functions.
11. Vores By Carlsberg: Open International Ideas Competition, Brief, 2.
12. En kvalitativ undersøgelse vedr. image af Carlsberg og Apollo 2006.
13. Petersen 2006, 3.
14. This survey was carried out by Carlsberg Ltd's archivist Ulla Nymand in collaboration with representatives from Denmark's Heritage Agency and was publicly accessible on the homepage [www.carlsberbyen.dk](http://www.carlsberbyen.dk) from 2007–2011.
15. Copenhagen Municipality (2009). Lokalplan 432 Carlsberg II, Copenhagen Municipality. Centerfor Bydesign.
16. Vores By Carlsberg 2007.
17. Where Carlsberg AS formerly was the sole owner of the site the split in the new consortium is as follows: Realdania (25%), Carlsberg (25%), PFA Pension (20%), PenSam (15%) and Topdanmark (15%).
18. Se bl.a. Peter Holst og Sidsel Jacobsen: "Visionen der forsvandt", *Berlingske Tidene*, 17. Oktober 2015.
19. The Heritage Agency of Denmark (2009).
20. Such as Tap 1 (concert hall and gallery), the Bubble Hall (sports facility), New Tap (offices, workshops) and DS Valby (go-cart rental and garage).
21. Jørgensen 2009.
22. Interview with Louise Panum Bostrup, Head of Development, The Carlsberg City. 18.th June, 2015.
23. Quoted in Fejerskov 2015.
24. Rosenvinge 2015.
25. See for instance the Administration Building, Works Central and Kettle House.



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